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## HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

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Landmark/District:	<b>Capitol Hill Historic District</b>	(x) Agenda
Address:	<b>1211 G Street, SE</b>	( ) Consent
		(x) Concept
Meeting Date:	<b>October 25, 2012</b>	(x) Alteration
Case Number:	<b>12-517</b>	(x) New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Amanda Molson</b>	( ) Demolition
		(x) Subdivision

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Prospective buyer Steve Snider, with drawings prepared by Carmel Greer of District Design, LLC, requests concept review for additions to 1211 G Street, SE and new construction on the adjoining parking lot. The site is located in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

### Property Description

In 1941, the Salvation Army constructed a brick church building at 1211 G Street, SE, replacing two 1880s frame dwellings constructed by owner C.D. Hindle. Art Deco in design, the building evidences Gothic-inspired touches such as the lancet-shaped transom window over the front door. Perhaps its most distinctive architectural element is the decorative parapet at the roofline, which calls attention to the main entrance. The building faces a series of two-story rowhouses on G Street, with both two- and three-story rowhouses extending along 12<sup>th</sup> Street in both directions.

By virtue of its age, the Salvation Army building contributes to the character of the Capitol Hill Historic District, the period of significance for which extends through 1945. However, this site now sits amidst the severely fractured historic context of Square 1020. In the late 1920s, about fifteen years before the church was constructed, this square included approximately 125 buildings. These included 1880s houses constructed by prolific builder Charles Gessford along G Street and 12<sup>th</sup> Street and 1920s houses designed by architects George Santmeyers and Vogt & Didden on I Street and 13<sup>th</sup> Street. In addition to the street-facing houses, Cooksey Alley extended through the middle of the square and included a total of 17 alley dwellings situated in a long row behind 13<sup>th</sup> Street and grouped in pairs closer to G Street. Dozens of one-story garages were also present in the alley, most of which were likely quite early based on the construction dates of the corresponding houses.

On the southwest corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and G sat Granch Public School, which has since been replaced by a Pepco power station. Rice Bakery occupied the present-day Caesar Chavez Charter School on the west side of 12<sup>th</sup>, with its complex including space for producing, packing, and shipping of baked goods. It was in many respects a setting that was quintessentially “Capitol Hill,” with a mix of building stock spanning two centuries and sized to accommodate various income levels, alley life bustling inside the square, a commercial presence nearby, and a neighborhood school on the corner.

Between 1957 and 1968, the Potomac Gardens public housing complex replaced all of the buildings in the square other than the Salvation Army building. The housing complex is six stories tall, includes a series of parking lots, and is enclosed by an 8' tall fence that was added in 1991. The Salvation Army parking lot at the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and G, which replaced four of Gessford's 1880s rowhouses, serves as an unfriendly visual connection to surrounding blocks, and the Salvation Army building itself is in need of deferred maintenance. Now for sale, the site includes an existing curb cut from 12<sup>th</sup> Street, a condition that has existed for many years. The curb cut on G Street belongs to the neighboring property, as does the parking lot it serves.

### **Proposal**

The applicant, a prospective purchaser, proposes alterations and additions to the Salvation Army building. A new multi-unit building would be constructed on the site of the parking lot. Together, the two elements of the project would create 29 residential units.

### *Subdivision*

As part of the project, a subdivision is requested in order to place the Salvation Army building on its own lot (it currently shares a lot with the parking lot). The new property line would extend logically along the eastern edge of the building's existing side court and then along the backyard. As it approaches the western edge of the building, the property line would jog slightly in order to avoid creating a court condition under the zoning regulations.

### *Alterations and Additions*

Three additions would be constructed on the Salvation Army building. A third floor would be added to the existing two-story rear ell which currently sits below the height of the main block of the building, a four-story rear addition faced in hardiplank would expand the building's depth by about 11' and a new rooftop addition, set back 25'-2" from the façade, would follow the footprint of the building. The fenestration of the rooftop addition's front wall would pick up on the window vocabulary of the new construction, featuring a series of multi-pane casement windows and double doors leading out to a shallow roof deck.

On the east-facing side of the Salvation Army building, along the neighbor's curb cut and parking lot, the existing side yard would be lowered to provide entry, light, and outdoor space for basement-level apartments. A descending set of steps aligned with the face of the building would provide access.

The windows throughout the Salvation Army building are in very poor condition, and many are inoperable. In order to convert the building to residential use, new operable windows are needed throughout. The front windows, whose shape adds character to the façade, will be retained and repaired or replaced in-kind in consultation with the HPO. On the other elevations, the existing window openings will be reconfigured for new double-hung replacements.

### *New Construction*

A new multi-unit residential building would be constructed on the site of the corner parking lot. The height of the new building is closely aligned with the proposed height of the Salvation Army building, once its rooftop addition is constructed. The new construction would be faced in brick on street-facing elevations, with hardiplank used for rear elevations facing into the site's planned parking lot. Though internally connected as a series of units, the design of the new construction

picks up the rhythm of surrounding rowhouses through the use of bay projections and basement entrances tucked beneath main entry doors. The top floor of each bay is treated as a porch-like element, in which an expanse of windows encloses it on all sides. Multi-light casement windows echo the fenestration of the Salvation Army building's façade and add a contemporary touch.

## **Evaluation**

### *Subdivision*

The proposal to place the Salvation Army building on its own lot is reflective of this square's history, in which dozens of rowhouses occupied individual lots. The plan to slightly jog the property line of the Salvation Army building on the west side raises no preservation issues, as the building itself remains wholly on one lot and will simply be absorbing a portion of the empty parcel. Subdividing the property will have preservation *benefits* in that it retains substantial portions of the historic building's fabric. Were the old and new buildings to share a lot, it is likely that a meaningful connection between the two would be required, resulting in the need for openings in the side wall of the historic building and realignment of its floors.

### *Alterations*

This site suffers from serious contextual issues, in which the existing building is dwarfed by the public housing complex behind it. All views of the Salvation Army building include a view of the much taller and monotonous Potomac Gardens building, its parking lots, and the security gate that encircles the property. The surface parking lot on the corner is of no benefit to the historic district, and it currently serves as a visual delineation between this square and its neighbors. The severe diminution of this square's historic character, the welcome opportunity to develop an empty parcel, and the preservation law's encouragement of adaptive use should afford flexibility in this site's development. Arguably, this square's inclusion in the historic district primarily reflects the understandable desire to exert some design control over any future development of the Potomac Gardens complex, the substantial size of which is impactful to neighboring squares.

The demolition plan for the Salvation Army building retains major structural components of the building, including floor and roof assemblies. Interior modifications will be made to reconfigure the space for residential units, and there will be some disruption of side and rear walls to accommodate reconfigured window openings and the rear addition. The extent of planned demolition seems reasonable and within the Board's purview to approve.

The conversion of inoperable and oddly spaced side and rear windows to operable double-hungs is consistent with the Board's window standards, which allow some flexibility in the alteration of window openings on secondary elevations (Section 2308.3). Though this particular building did not utilize double-hung windows when originally constructed, they are widely used throughout the historic district (including on other buildings of the 1940s) and are very appropriate for the simply articulated side and rear walls. New bricks on these walls will need to be properly toothed-in so that a haphazard array of old and new openings is avoided. The applicants have committed to the HPO that the façade of the building will be treated as a restoration project, with those windows restored or replaced in-kind in consultation with staff.

The plan to replace the existing, at-grade side court with a sunken terrace is a reasonable alteration for residential reuse, and it does not alter important character-defining features. This elevation extends alongside a parking lot, and locating egress doors and windows on this side

wall spares the building's façade from major alterations. However, the basement steps leading down from the front yard should be set back from the building's face by several feet to help buffer views from the street and to help the building hold its visual connection to the ground. It appears that the basement unit closest to the front of the building will not have access to this outdoor space, allowing the staircase to be pushed back to create a generous at-grade walkway and landing at the top. Though the exact measurement will depend on interior layout, it should be between 5' and 10'. The site plan and side elevation drawings do not show the inevitable railings that will be needed around the periphery of the terrace area and leading down from the steps. Specifications should be developed in consultation with staff.

The location of the meter boxes serving the Salvation Army building has not been finalized and will be explored as construction drawings are prepared. Under no circumstances should the meter boxes or any other utility equipment be placed on the building's façade. These items should instead be located on the building's interior, on the rear elevation, or in the sunken terrace area below-grade. The applicants should include a detailed plan for the utility meters, supported by DCRA's electrical reviewers and by Pepco, as a condition of final approval.

#### *Additions*

The plan to construct a third floor over the rear ell and a small rear addition raise no obvious preservation issues. Their massing is certainly subordinate when considered in the totality of the building's square footage, and they are mostly obscured from street views given their location.

The flexibility afforded by the surrounding context should allow some visibility of the rooftop addition. Although the Board generally requires that rooftop additions to historic buildings not be visible from the street, it seems impractical to uphold this requirement when the building is set against such a disrupted and comparatively overwhelming backdrop. The rooftop addition has been set back a generous 25', and the most visible vantage point will be looking across the neighboring building's parking lot off G Street. The new construction will hide the rooftop addition in views from 12<sup>th</sup> Street and from the eastern portion of G Street, and the narrowness of G Street itself will assist in limiting views from across the street. The shallowness of the roof deck, which projects only 4' from the face of the addition, will ensure that the inevitable "clutter" of roof deck décor is largely out of sight.

There has been internal staff discussion regarding the fenestration of the rooftop addition's street-facing elevation. It was originally planned to mimic the windows in the Salvation Army building itself, and it has been changed to reflect the vocabulary of the new construction. This is less a desire to clearly differentiate old from new (which will be differentiated suitably by the setback) and more an attempt to visually tie together the two elements of the site. It also has the added benefit of helping the new floor to read as a separate penthouse level. That said, the minimal visibility of this elevation from street level makes this a minor concern in the overall scheme of the project and one that could certainly be adjusted at the Board's discretion.

#### *New Construction*

The applicants have sensitively scaled the new construction to closely reflect the massing of the Salvation Army building. Though the building will be taller than many of the surrounding historic rowhouses, this additional height is beneficial in holding the corner with a strong presence, in buffering some of the views of the housing complex, and in transitioning from large-scale to small-scale buildings. The use of bay projections successfully breaks down the

horizontality of the building, with the differently treated top floors of the bays creating visual interest not unlike the many turrets, open balconies, and parapets that top Capitol Hill's historic bayfront houses. The window vocabulary, in pane configuration and method of operability, nicely reflects the Salvation Army building and avoids an attempt to copy an overtly "Victorian" façade.

The set of doors on the north-facing elevation, closest to the Salvation Army building, merit restudy. This elevation originally showed three above-grade entrances, but this entrance was lowered when the bay projections were reconfigured. Although it may be an attempt to relate better to the scale of the Salvation Army entrance, the resulting expanse of masonry above this set of doors is ill-proportioned, giving the effect that a previous above-grade entrance was lowered at some point. This entrance should be located above-grade or reworked to include a window opening or some sort of decorative relief above.

As with the Salvation Army building, utility meters serving the new building should not be placed on any street-facing elevation. They should instead be located inside the buildings, on the rear of the building facing into the parking lot, or in the basement areaways. Details should be included in the drawings submitted for final approval.

As construction drawings are prepared for the site as a whole, the applicants should consult with staff on details such as masonry restoration, new lead walks and landscaping, fencing around front and rear yards, exact window and door specifications, and cornice material. This is an exciting project with the promise to revitalize this much-neglected corner, and the refinement of minor details will lead to a project we can all celebrate.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff with the following conditions. However, this should not be construed as approval for any necessary zoning relief.*

- *Utility meters for the historic building and the new construction should be located on the interior, on a rear elevation, or in the basement areaways. A detailed plan for the utility meters, supported by DCRA's electrical reviewers and by Pepco, should be submitted for final approval.*
- *The staircase leading to the basement terrace abutting the Salvation Army building should be set back from the face of the building.*
- *The entrance doors next to the Salvation Army building should be restudied to better respond to the façade of the new construction.*
- *Prior to final approval, the applicants should work with staff on the aforementioned details pertaining to the site plan and specifications for railings, fencing, windows, doors, and materials. Those elements should be incorporated into the final construction drawings.*